

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL
at 7.00pm on Wednesday 4th January, 2023 in Wicken Sports Club**

01/23 Attendance

In attendance:

- Cllr. Neil Gordon- Lee: Chair
- Cllr. Verity Robinson
- Cllr. Philip Ivens
- Cllr. Petra Spencer-Jones
- Cllr. Ian Howett
- Cllr. Andrew Stockbridge
- John Westlake: Clerk

The Chair:

- Welcomed a new Councillor, Andrew Stockbridge, to the meeting.
- Announced that John Marchant, a well- known and active villager had recently died.
- Announced that Giles Butterfield, Chairman of the Solar Farm Committee had sustained a broken hip resulting from a cycle accident, and on behalf of the Parish Council wished him a speedy recovery.

02/23 To approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 2nd November, 2022 and the Extraordinary Meeting of 30th November, 2022.

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved and signed by the Chair.

03/23 Replacement and upgrade of electricity poles throughout Wicken

Jon Lay, Project Engineer, West Bucks National Grid was in attendance to brief the parish council on this exercise to replace poles and overhead lines; this is essential to ensure the reliability of the electricity supply. This will commence in mid -January and take approximately ten weeks to complete. A letter has been delivered to all households in Wicken providing assurance that although there will be planned interruptions in supply these will be arranged in advance with each household, and will normally be of one or two hours duration. It may be necessary to shut down part of the village or a road in which case cards will be delivered to each household giving five days' notice. Street lights on poles will be transferred to new poles. Apparatus belonging to Openreach on existing poles will normally be transferred to new poles. However in some cases it will be necessary for Openreach to effect the transfer, in which case it will be necessary for there to be two poles side by side until they are able to carry out the work which, unfortunately, may be after an extended delay. In response to questions from Councillors and the public, Mr. Lay:

- Stated that siting the cables underground was not an option because the cost would be up to ten times the cost of the intended works.
- Confirmed that it should not be necessary to close any roads although it may be necessary to utilise traffic lights.
- The exact siting of new poles can be arranged with the householder. The maximum time that

the electricity supply will be off is from 9.00am until 4.00pm.

- If necessary lines from a pole to a house will be replaced.
- Larger cables will be installed to ensure consistency of power throughout the village.
- The poles which are removed can be left for local use, subject to a signed declaration, and a fee of £50.

04/23 Members Interests: Members are invited to declare disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests in items on the agenda as required by the Wicken Parish Council Code of Conduct for Members and by the Localism Act 2011

The Chair stated that he assumed all Councillors had made the necessary declarations.

05/23 To receive a report from West Northamptonshire Councillor: Ken Pritchard (taken part way through Item 08/23)

Cllr. Pritchard, who had just left a WNDC budget meeting briefed the meeting as follows:

Finance

- A projected overrun by WNDC of £50m had been reduced to an over spend of £2.75m.
- The Council Tax for 2023/24 is expected to increase by 2.99%. This will avoid a referendum which would be necessary if the proposed increase is 3% or more.
- An increase in the Social Care Precept will add a further 2%.
- A further £86, based on Band D, will be added, which is necessary following the harmonisation of the three former district council areas now combined to constitute WNDC.
- An increase (as yet unspecified) in the charge for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner will be necessary.
- He expects that the cumulative impact of these changes, based on Band D, will be a total increase of approximately 7%.
- The charge for the collection of “green bins” will increase from £42 to £55.
- The collection of “black bins” may be at three week intervals (currently two weeks).
- Council house rents will increase by 7%.
- Other increased charges (e.g. for planning applications) will apply.
- Car parking charges will be introduced.

Planning

- The proposed construction of distribution centre near the Old Stratford roundabout is subject to consultation. This is “on hold” with 12/18 months before a decision.
- A proposal to build 87 homes in Deanshanger (outside the village confines) has been rejected.
- In response to a request from Cllr. Stockbridge, Mr. Pritchard agreed to provide feedback on progress on the Strategic Plan at the next meeting.
- In response to a question from Cllr. Howett the link road to connect the A5 to the A43 is expected to be completed in Autumn 2024.

06/23 Public Forum

No issues were raised by members of the public present.

07/23 To note update on standing items

Information had been previously circulated on standing items. To add to this:

- Gigaclear: The Chair confirmed that the request for the siting of the box on Leckhampstead Road had been complied with.
- Speed monitor: Cllr. Howett reported that it had not been possible to download data but efforts to do this through updated access should resolve this.

08/23 Finance

Budget for 2023/24

The Chair had previously circulated a draft budget and a recommendation for the precept application to all Councillors for consideration. The recommended precept of £9400 represents an increase of 11.90% on the previous year, and reflects an increase in costs. The budget and the recommended precept were approved.

Payments and Receipts

The Chair referred to the figures in the table on the agenda. These were approved.

09/23 To consider action on playground maintenance

Cllr. Spencer-Jones had received the annual inspection report and will be liaising with Cllr. Robinson on the implementation of any recommendations. A concern is the cost of installing replacements rather than the cost of them. The possibility of installation by a “non-professional” was discussed, and the question of liability for an incident resulting from faulty installation was raised, and if this would be covered by the council’s insurance. The Clerk will check the situation with insurers.

CLERK TO ACTION

10/23 Police liaison representative

The Chair reported that the Clerk had volunteered to be the representative, and this was approved.

11/23 To consider tree planting

The Chair made the meeting aware that Mrs. Celina Francklin, who was present, had submitted a proposal for the planting of an avenue of Lime Trees, together with a quotation from Nicholson’s-Plants, Forestry, Landscapes for planting and maintenance, to the Chair of the Solar Farm Committee, who had passed it to the Parish Council. The trees planted would be up to four metres in height. This would support The Queen’s Green Canopy initiative to honour the late Queen, and be a legacy for future generations.

The Chair expressed the opinion that planting of trees is a good idea, and should receive universal approval from the residents of Wicken. He was mindful, however, that regular watering would be essential to ensure the survival of the trees, and that the quotation for this was £7,000 per annum. He had circulated the proposal and quotation to members of the Solar Farm Committee, and had received various responses. These were generally supportive, but included:

- Concerns at the quoted cost of watering, coupled with the suggestion that this could be carried out by volunteers. (This would depend on the acquisition of a water bowser.)
- Comments that other sites in the village may be more appropriate, perhaps planting in various locations.
- Suggestions that a more diverse variety of trees could be planted to reduce the impact of disease affecting a specific species.
- A concern that such a large sum should be devoted to a single project.

A discussion followed, which covered the following:

- It may be better to plant smaller/younger trees which would sink roots more quickly and be less expensive.
- The nature of the soil elsewhere in the village may be less suitable than that on Whittlebury Road.
- The sourcing of water, bearing in mind that the nearest source to Whittlebury Road is at Wicken Sports Club, which is metered but does not pay sewerage charges
- There is the possibility that a source of water may be a disused well, alongside Whittlebury Road.
- There needs to be assurance that a continuing commitment to maintenance, together with the necessary fund can be maintained.
- Permission would have to be obtained from Merchant Venturers, the freeholders of the land on which the planting is proposed as well as Paul Ward who farms the adjacent fields.

In response to a question the Chair stated that currently a sum of £1500 is allocated for tree planting, with the prospect of additional funding from the Solar Farm later in 2023 and from Solar Farm 2 in 2024. He pointed out that there will be other demands on funding from the Solar Farms. He informed the meeting that it would be essential to obtain three quotations for the project. The Clerk confirmed this, and added that there are additional specific requirements, under the regulations governing the finances of parish councils, for contracts of a value of £25,000 or more.

The Chair stated a sustainable plan needs to be in place by September 2023, before the project is given the “go ahead” and before the commencement of the tree planting season (November to March). He referred the meeting to a Woodland Trust publication, “The State of the UK’s Woods and Trees” as background reading to assist understanding of the need for tree planting. This may be accessed through the link:

[State of the UK's Woods and Trees - Woodland Trust](#)

Cllr. Stockbridge suggested that consideration should be given to:

- Planting the right trees in the right place.
- Having a wider discussion on where trees should be planted in the village.
- Maintenance.
- If the planting of a single tree type is an issue.

Actions to be undertaken by Parish Council:

Obtaining two other quotations for a tree planting scheme
Establish relative suitability in respect of soil for sites within Wicken
Obtain written consent from freeholder and tenant with regard to planting proposal
Produce a risk assessment to cover; maintenance, single species, water sources, tree sizes
Identify historic location of windmill water pump on Whittlebury Road.
Confirm potential arrangement with Cllr Ivens to provide a water bowser and labour for watering

12/23 To consider a planning application for a replacement residential dwelling at 2 Pightle Cottages, Wicken Park Road, Wicken

There were no objections to this application and the Clerk will inform WNDC accordingly.
CLERK TO ACTION

13/23 To consider the Parish Council using Facebook to announce key information

The Chair introduced the idea of Facebook simply as a medium of transmitting information with residents, without the facility for “two way communication”. This was discussed and received general approval. The Chairman will liaise with the Clerk and Cllr. Robinson to explore the practicalities. **CHAIR TO ACTION**

14/23 To consider a new village consultation

The Chair asked councillors for their views on an event to which residents would be invited to give their views and provide feedback on developments in the village, and the work of the parish council. The consensus was that this could be effectively obtained by a questionnaire. The Chair undertook to work on this. **CHAIR TO ACTION**

15/23 To appoint a Vice Chair

The Chair requested a volunteer to act as Vice Chair, following the resignation of Alan Cartwright. There were no immediate volunteers so councillors were asked to consider standing for this office.

16/23 Co-option of replacement Councillor

The Chair reminded the meeting that it is necessary to co-opt a replacement Councillor to fill a vacancy. He is hopeful that there is a prospective candidate and will keep the council informed. It may be necessary to hold an Extraordinary Meeting to appoint this individual.

17/23 To note future meeting dates: 1st March 2023, 3rd May 2023 and 4th July 2023

18/23 To note/consider items for next meeting

The planting of wild flowers on the bank adjacent to the bridge on Wicken Park Road.

Councillor Neil Gordon-Lee
Chair, Wicken Parish Council